

Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices in Northampton Decision Making

May 13, 2008 Public Forum Synthesized Citizen Input Report

The Ad Hoc Committee hosted a well-attended public forum at J.F.K. Middle School on May 13, 2008. A facilitated large-group exercise was conducted where attendees were asked to silently spend 20 minutes writing thoughts and ideas about Northampton decision-making on butcher paper lining the walls of the JFK Community Room. Participants then broke up into small groups to discuss and develop these ideas with each group reporting back to the entire group at the end of the evening.

(A video of the forum can be viewed online [here](#) with thanks to Adam Cohen and the North Street Association)

The Committee transcribed all of the input gathered during the large and small group exercises and posted that document on its web site together with a photo archive of the original written comments.

A Committee working group analyzed, discussed, and synthesized all of that material into the following list of public recommendations organized under three main best practice issue areas:

Citizen Participation/Public Dialog

- Reinvigorate citizen advisory committee
- Share committee ideas with the public
- Hold meetings on issues, not process
- Small citizen meetings before large group meetings
- Limit number of boards on which a person may sit
- Meet after 5pm to accommodate people who work
- Open process for joining committees
- Public education on how city works
- Encourage neighborhood associations
- Volunteerism
- Review Planning board rules for public input
- Require regular ward meetings
- Restructure public hearings/public comment

- Respond to those who speak at public hearings
- Increase detail in agenda
- Open design process
- Create clear protocol for citizen involvement
- Early involvement of public how/when
- Train decision makers on class/race awareness
- Review Mayoral appointments
- Look at committee diversity
- Provide opportunity for committee member training
- Foster an atmosphere of respect

Communication/Outreach

- Advance notice of meetings in diverse ways: public bulletin board
- City website to get volunteers
- Notification of public works projects
- How does the city decide what to do with public land/buildings
- Build in systems for accountability
- Formalize NCTV/Blogs/Community Radio into City communication
- Make available contact information of public officials
- Look at citizens budget for Lawrence, MA

Governmental Procedures

- Restructure Public comment during council meetings
- Review process for committee appointments
- Provide independent legal advice
- Translate jargon into easy to understand terms and concepts
- Revisit City School program